

VZCZCXYZ0013
PP RUEHWEB

DE RUEHAK #1326/01 2061201
ZNY SSSSS ZZH
P 241201Z JUL 08
FM AMEMBASSY ANKARA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6933
INFO RUEHKB/AMEMBASSY BAKU PRIORITY 1561
RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PRIORITY 5601
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY 5449
RUEHSI/AMEMBASSY TBILISI PRIORITY 3147
RUEHYE/AMEMBASSY YEREVAN PRIORITY 1326

S E C R E T ANKARA 001326

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EUR DAS BRYZA, EUR/SE, EUR/CARC

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/23/2018

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [AJ](#) [AM](#) [GG](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: BAKU-TBILISI-KARS RAILWAY GROUNDBREAKING; GOAJ
CONCERNED ABOUT TURKEY-ARMENIAN TALKS

Classified By: Ambassador Ross Wilson, reasons 1.4 (b,d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. President Gul traveled to the ancient Armenian capital of Ani July 23 before joining Georgian President Saakashvili and Azerbaijani President Aliyev for a groundbreaking ceremony in Kars, Turkey on the Turkish leg of the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars (BTK) railway, July 24. The bilateral meeting with Aliyev is expected to cover Turkey-Armenia relations and Azerbaijani concerns about Turkey opening the border with Armenia and strengthening Armenia's hand on Nagorno-Karabakh (N-K). Gul will reportedly urge Saakashvili in his other bilateral to seek dialogue with Abkhaz de facto authorities; Turkey is still keen to host Saakashvili-Bagapsh talks in Turkey. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) MFA South Caucasus Section Head Yavuz Kul previewed for us the July 24 BTK railway groundbreaking ceremony, to be attended by Presidents Gul, Aliyev and Saakashvili in Kars. President Gul traveled to Kars July 23 and visited the medieval Armenian city of Ani, located in Kars province, just on the Turkish side of the border with Armenia. The ceremony's timing, he emphasized, coincidentally overlaps with press coverage here on Turkey-Armenia talks (septel). The Ministry of Transportation has completed its preparations and the three leaders had reportedly expressed their enthusiasm to reconvene and launch the project's Turkish leg when they last met together, at the groundbreaking ceremony in Georgia, November 2007. The project is reportedly proceeding well, notably in Georgia, where the entire existing line is being rehabilitated; it will still be about three years before the railway is operational, however. Gul will host a bilateral meeting with each president; no official trilateral meeting is envisioned.

AZERBAIJAN: STRONG CONCERN
ABOUT TURKEY-ARMENIA RELATIONS

¶3. (S) Turkey-Armenia relations will likely dominate Gul's bilateral meeting with Aliyev, according to Kul. Azerbaijani Deputy FM Azimov visited Ankara July 21 for scheduled bilateral political consultations with MFA Deputy U/S Cevikoz, and Armenia dominated their discussion. According to Kul, the Azerbaijanis are deeply concerned that Turkey will open the border. With "palpable frustration," Azimov reportedly cautioned the Turks that such a move would create a backlash against Turkey in Azerbaijani society, and pressed for specific details about Turkey-Armenia talks.

¶4. (S) According to Kul, the Turks tried to reassure Azimov by emphasizing that talks between Turkey and Armenia are long-running and periodic, but did not detail the process. The MFA fears an Azerbaijani attempt to derail this process, for example, by President Aliyev calling PM Erdogan directly

and complaining. Azimov made no specific warnings, but noted to the Turks Azerbaijan's importance to the trilateral projects Turkey values: the BTC/BTE oil and gas pipelines, and the railroad. (Azerbaijan is financing the Turkish and Georgian portion of BTK.) Azerbaijan strongly believes that Turkish openings to Armenia will strengthen Armenia's negotiating position on N-K; it is not persuaded by the argument, which KQ said Turkey broadly accepts, that Turkish openings will make it easier for Armenia to negotiate on N-K.

15. (S) Kul underlined, "this is not the old Azerbaijan." Baku has strong connections throughout Turkey, including the media, the military and the political opposition, as well as a sizable diaspora community in eastern Turkey, Istanbul and Ankara. Kul opined that it was probably Azerbaijan, having learned about the Turkey-Armenia talks in Switzerland from a well-placed contact in Ankara, that leaked the news about the talks to the press so it could discuss them with Turkey. Kul emphasized that Turkey is committed to the Armenia effort and differentiates its relations with Baku and Yerevan.

GEORGIA: BAGAPSH VISIT TO TURKEY LIKELY

16. (C) Kul said Abkhaz "President" Bagapsh still wants to come to Turkey, though no specific dates have been proposed. The Georgians oppose it, but Turkey is unlikely to stand in the way of the Turkish-Circassian community and Abkhaz diaspora NGOs inviting him this time. Kul reiterated that Turkey would be willing to host a Bagapsh-Saakashvili meeting in Turkey, where ideas to help create some breathing room for the Abkhaz, such as a direct ferry connection to Trabzon, could be discussed. Other confidence building measures and Turkish incentives could be discussed. Gul is unlikely to

discuss in detail any such proposals with Saakashvili but will encourage him to remain measured and pursue dialogue with the Abkhaz. Reflecting on DAS Bryza's recent visit (septel), Kul noted Turkey's support for the U.S. effort to coax from Georgia a non-use-of-force pledge, which Turkey believes is essential to making any progress on this issue.

ANI: NO STRONG MESSAGE TO ARMENIA INTENDED

17. (C) Kul emphasized that Gul was not sending a message to Armenia by traveling to Ani. The Ministry of Culture has been consulting with various international organizations and NGOs concerning restoration work there. If there is a message intended for Yerevan, it is that Turkey cares about Armenian heritage and will work to preserve it. The Turks are aware that restoring Ani could constitute a useful confidence building measure. He believes Turkey would be open to working jointly with Armenian experts on an Ani restoration, and would not rule out a limited border opening measure to facilitate direct Armenian travel there.

Visit Ankara's Classified Web Site at
<http://www.intelink.sgov.gov/wiki/Portal:Turkey>

WILSON